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COMMITTEE ON NON-GOVERNMENTAL
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Agenda item 2

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

Statement submitted by Soroptimist International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 29 and 30 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

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Soroptimist International is a non-governmental organization with membership representative of the many cultural and ethnic groups of women in over 100 countries of the world.

Soroptimist International has enjoyed consultative status with the Economic and Social Council for 40 years and in 1984 was granted consultancy status, category I, in recognition of its wide range of activities in the economic and social fields that are the concern of the Council and its subsidiary bodies.

With representatives active in the United Nations centres at Geneva, Vienna, Paris and New York, Soroptimist International has not only promoted widely the work of the United Nations, but on many occasions has also provided expert assistance to Governments and secretariat staff at these locations as well as at national levels.

Soroptimist International feels that the consultative process is quite unique in that it enables the United Nations to avail itself of the technical expertise and knowledge of non-governmental organizations. The Council, through its Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations, has set up a valid method of determining the competence of non-governmental organizations and their usefulness to the work of the United Nations. Moreover, the Committee has always viewed with seriousness and carried out with much diligence its mandate to place non-governmental organizations in this special consultative relationship.

Soroptimist International feels that the Economic and Social Council, pursuant to resolution 1296 (XLIV), fully addresses the concerns expressed and the procedures called for in Article 71 of the Charter of the United Nations, and that the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations has been consistent in reflecting the desires of member States, the United Nations Secretariat and non-governmental organizations in establishing a collaborative community in which the capabilities of non-governmental organizations can be brought to bear on the work of the United Nations. However, Soroptimist International feels that recent actions taken by other bodies regarding the participation of non governmental organizations has weakened and could make irrelevant the work of the Committee over the years.

Soroptimist International is deeply concerned by the fact that the procedures adopted at the recent organizational session of the Economic and Social Council regarding representation of and consultation with non-governmental organizations in the Commission on Sustainable Development, as set forth in Council decision 1993/215, while allowing for a more fully and widely distributed representation which Soroptimist International endorses, does in fact limit the participation of non-governmental organizations, categories I and II, by eliminating rights and privileges provided for in Council resolution 1296. Soroptimist International finds this regrettable. The Council has opened the halls of the Commission to a large number of non-governmental organizations, which in itself is commendable; however, the Council has called for like-minded non-governmental organizations to be heard through one or more designated spokespersons. Non-governmental organizations, similar to member States, are proudly defensive of their independence and of the goals and purposes for which they were formed. No one non-governmental organization can speak on behalf of all other non-governmental organizations, as recently occurred at the

Commission's organizational session, without first consulting those non-governmental organizations for whom it is presumably speaking.

There have of course been many instances where some non-governmental organizations voluntarily grouped together to issue a joint statement, either written or oral, but such statements were given in the names of only those non-governmental organizations that had voluntarily signed them.

Soroptimist International considers that it may be time for a review and that there may be a need for certain structural changes (for example, the Committee now meets every two years instead of annually); however, the basic intent of Council resolution 1296 should not be altered, and whatever changes are envisioned should involve expanding facilities and resources to enable even greater participation and dialogue and strengthen the contacts between Governments and non-governmental organizations.

Soroptimist International therefore hopes that the member States of the Committee on non-governmental organizations will bring the following points for consideration to the attention of the Economic and Social Council:

(a) That representation should be open only to national and international organizations that can make a viable contribution to the work of the Council;

(b) That the many organizations currently in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council whose headquarters are in industrialized countries have membership that extends to the grass-roots level of local communities throughout the developing countries, and that their current leadership and policies fully reflect the concerns and wishes of these members;

(c) That eliminating the reproduction and distribution of non-governmental organization statements by the United Nations Secretariat will actually be more detrimental to national non-governmental organizations, especially those in developing countries whose budgets may not be adequate to produce statements in the number of languages and the quantities required for distribution;

(d) That any review undertaken should be carried out in consultation with Secretariat staff that have benefited from consultation with non-governmental organizations as well as with the non-governmental organizations themselves.

Soroptimist International feels that the consultative process has proved beneficial to the work of the United Nations and that its continuing value can only be enhanced by:

(a) Wider and fuller understanding of the consultative role of non-governmental organizations as one distinct from the public relations role;

(b) Providing for non-governmental organization participation in the major organs of the United Nations and their subsidiary bodies;

(c) Restoration of the Working Group on Relations between Non-Governmental Organizations and the Secretariat and United Nations Programmes (mentioned in document ST/SGB/209), which monitored compliance with the rules and guidelines governing the non-governmental organization/United Nation relationship;

(d) Increasing of both human and financial resources in order to provide to the ever-expanding number of non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council the proper services necessary to meaningful participation.